

TESTIMONY OF ELLIOTT BALBERT
BEFORE
THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
September 22, 2004

Chairman Burton and Honorable Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you as a representative of the dietary supplement industry. I am Elliott Balbert, CEO of Natrol, Inc. Natrol is a diversified nutrition company that manufactures and markets premium branded, nutritional products for a wide range of consumer needs. While running Natrol is obviously an important and central role for me, I am here in another capacity, as Chairman of a not-for-profit group, the Dietary Supplement Education Alliance, known as DSEA.

DSEA was created in 2001 as a way for my industry to help ensure that the intent of the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA) is met by providing meaningful information about the health benefits and responsible use of dietary supplements to all Americans. As you well know Mr. Chairman, an important aspect of the passage of this critical law was to ensure that all of us as potential consumers of dietary supplements were educated about them – the very reason for the “E” in DSHEA. For that very reason, those of us involved in DSEA have worked hard over the past three years to educate the public, the media and even members of Congress and their staffs through our website, www.supplementinfo.org, and other educational activities and means. In fact, one of our ongoing educational efforts is a monthly mailing to members of Congress where we strive to provide those of you on the Hill with essential information on the benefits of supplements.

As a representative of DSEA, I have three important points to make here today.

First, as you’ve heard from Dr. Blumberg and Dr. Levine, **dietary supplements have been shown to be safe and effective aids for maintaining health and preventing disease.**

Just think about the implications of this on a human level: dietary supplements can help prevent a life of disability due to neural tube defects; dietary supplements can enable senior citizens to live fuller lives without the disability of a broken hip; dietary supplements can help active adults have less discomfort from arthritic knees; the potential goes on and on.

This isn’t a matter of statistics; it’s a matter of the ability to lead healthy, happy lives. As Ms. Henner has described, the use of supplements can make a huge difference to real people.

Second, these relatively inexpensive supplements can help our country with the critical issue of managing health care costs.

One of the most pressing problems confronting the U.S. today is the spiraling cost of medical care. As you've heard from Dr. Dobson, just two dietary supplements examined in this study could provide over \$15 billion in savings in the next five years.

The study outlined today examined the cost saving ability of just a few supplements. Many more are available with tremendous potential to help improve health status and also avoid high cost medical services. Dietary supplements can be a potent tool in our efforts to manage health care costs.

Third, to take advantage of the health-promoting and cost-saving potential of supplements, people need accurate, science-based information about dietary supplements and access to them.

To ensure that dietary supplements get the research attention they deserve, ongoing support for the Office of Dietary Supplements (ODS) and National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) is essential. We would urge members of this Subcommittee to strive to find ways to increase funding to these governmental bodies. We are confident that more extensive research will only further support the benefits, safety, effectiveness and cost savings we heard about in today's hearing.

To promote education about supplements, full implementation of the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act is important. Chairman Burton, we applaud your recognition of this critical aspect and praise your efforts to achieve this goal by your introduction of H.R. 4747, which I wholeheartedly support. I believe there is more that can and should to be done to ensure that consumers have access to balanced, science-based facts about dietary supplements so they can make informed decisions about achieving and maintaining optimum health.

To ensure even greater access to supplements, bills like your Tax Fairness Act are critical, and represent legislation we endorse. The Tax Fairness Act would allow taxpayers to deduct amounts paid for foods for special dietary uses, dietary supplements, or medical foods as medical expenses – thereby fairly putting supplements on par with other health benefits. Likewise, the ability of food stamp recipients to use their benefits to purchase dietary supplements, as you and others have proposed in the past, Mr. Chairman, is an idea we hope will be pursued in future legislation.

In closing, I would like point out that although many congressional hearings focus on what's gone wrong, hearings like this provide encouragement to continue doing what's not only right to do, but cost effective too. I want to thank the

Chairman and others on the Subcommittee for taking the time to address the positive aspects of dietary supplements.